

Arcana Arcanorum: Cagliostro's Legacy in Contemporary Magical Movements

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Alessandro di Cagliostro (1743 or 1749-1795) is the subject of a number of historical studies. These have discussed his identification with Giuseppe Balsamo, a Sicilian wanted for a number of small crimes who mysteriously disappeared before the sudden appearance of a "Count of Cagliostro" in 1776 (an identification he desperately denied to his death which, however, is now largely accepted by historians), his involvement in the European politics just before the French Revolution, his process before the Rome Inquisition in 1791 and his subsequent imprisonment in the Fortress of San Leo, where he died in 1795. There are, however, very few studies which discuss Cagliostro's influence on subsequent magical movements that flourished in the 19th and 20th centuries. This paper is aimed at tracing the shadow of Cagliostro in the history of modern occult societies and groups, and at showing how reading Cagliostro could still be of relevance for contemporary occult scholars.

What sense, exactly, does it make to reread Cagliostro today? Does it make sense because of historical curiosity, literary interest, or for the promotion of tourism to Italy? Or is Cagliostro, in some sense, still a contemporary figure? Hans Nintzel has written that there are probably more persons who practice alchemy today—laboratory alchemy, with stills and distillation—than there were during the Middle Ages.¹ Paraphrasing Nintzel, one could also say that the disciples of Cagliostro—that is, those persons who practice ritual forms inspired by those he wrote or collected—are probably more numerous today than they were during the life of the "Gran Cofto" (the title he assumed in the "Egyptian" masonic rite he founded). This conclusion, which can at first strike one as quite surprising, is based on the small number of authentic disciples of Cagliostro and practitioners of his "Egyptian" rite during his life, compared with the many more followers of the "new magical movements" in our century,² and on the fact that the rituals practiced by many contemporary magical movements are inspired by, when not literally copied from, the rituals of Cagliostro.

In order to determine the impact of Cagliostro on contemporary magical/esoteric rituals one must overcome at least two prejudices. Students of eighteenth century Italian culture have emphasized that the Italian "Illuminismo" (Enlightenment)—reminiscent of the French word "Illuminisme"—refers not only to the rationalism of the

"Philosophers" but also to the occultism of the "Illuminati." These two aspects of the word "Illuminismo," in Italian, are inseparable:

Beside the Enlightenment, which was guided by reason and proceeded from science, there is the mystical movement which searches for solutions to various problems in esoteric cults, in miracles and magic. And these two movements not only walk side by side, but at times intersect and often, in fact, live and manifest themselves in the same person.³

If scholars now largely recognize this ambiguity, some of them still distinguish between the "charlatans à la Cagliostro" and the "Rosicrucians and Spiritualists who developed their researches with great intellectual honesty."⁴ The thesis that there is a radical separation between Cagliostro and the more "respectable" or "noble" esotericism of his time is old and was largely proposed before the publication in the years 1906-1909 of the first important abstracts from Cagliostro's *Rituals of Egyptian Masonry* by Marc Haven, alias the medical doctor Emmanuel Lalande (1868-1926). One can perhaps see such a radical difference—as one would say with philosopher of science Imre Lakatos—in the "external history" of the occult sciences, and in the different psychological perspectives and the private lives of Cagliostro and other occultists. But in the "internal" history of occultism—the history, according to Lakatos, which takes into account the development of a science without considering the private lives of its practitioners—the principles and the rituals of the "noble" Rosicrucians and of the "charlatan" Cagliostro are often impossible to distinguish, and the circulation of various ideas between the diverse systems of magic was continuous. From another perspective, the harshest criticisms by one group or tradition against another within the occult underworld are often evidence that the first group is simply attempting to conceal that it has, in fact, been influenced by the second. A contemporary Catholic Archbishop, who is also a scholar specializing in new religions and magic, has explained the paradoxical presence of an "occultist anti-occultism," "promoted by the exponents of various magical and esoteric movements, who prepare critical works which denounce, and which distinguish between 'white magic' (their own) and 'black magic' (the magic practiced by the others) between 'initiation' (that they offer to their members) and 'counter-initiation' (offered by the competition). There is today a flowering of this type of literature, which may provide interesting information, but which assumes from the beginning the point of view of a particular esoteric current, or of a certain magical movement, to be able to criticize all of the others."⁵

The second prejudice, which is more subtle, is found even in Marc Haven, who had an authentic veneration for Cagliostro. Haven wrote that the two "quarantines"—or magical retreats of forty days in the system of Cagliostro—"are a small part, the less important, of his work."⁶ Marc Haven proposed an interpretation more mystical than magical of Cagliostro, to be understood within the frame of the whole esoteric career of this French doctor. Haven married the daughter of the healer of Lyon, Nizier Anthelme Philippe, "Maître Philippe" (1849-1905). Philippe, in turn, was considered

a reincarnation of Cagliostro; but some members of his circle went further, and considered both Philippe and Cagliostro as "reappearitions" or new incarnations of Jesus Christ.⁷ Philippe, however, was a Christian (although unorthodox) healer, who came to believe, with respect to magic, that "the writings about it are criminal" and that the way of the mystic was preferable because "the gospels contain all of the initiations."⁸ Other authors, without the complex motivations of Marc Haven, remain equally disconcerted about the "quarantines"; one concludes that they consist of "magical practices and therapeutic cures which, when applied realistically, could kill any human being in the space of only a few days."⁹ With respect to this quote from Professor Carlo Francovich, one of the most brilliant students of seventeenth century Italian Freemasonry, it is useful to make reference to the malicious comment of Francesco Brunelli (1927-82), a medical doctor from Perugia who was a key figure in the recent history of new magical movements in Italy:

Those who do not have proper practical experience, have not gone through the same journeys, and have not followed the same system of catharsis and purification, really do not qualify to interpret documents, symbols and rites. At this point it is necessary to say a definitive good-bye to the historians and to those who spend their time in libraries. They may be good at working in the archives and in pulling forth the various treatises which are lost and full of dust. It is good that they receive honors and prizes, and are awarded academic degrees for their work, . . . but in the profane world, a world very different from our own! What can these persons say to us concerning the magic of alchemy and concerning the quarantines of Cagliostro?¹⁰

This is a typical perspective from an insider in the occult underworld, and evidences the rift which exists between those who view the rituals with the eyes of historians, and those who are anxious to "practice" and to follow the prescriptions of the ancient masters. But the distance cannot be exaggerated too much, because the prescriptions of Cagliostro make sense—and one can understand why many magical movements have followed such prescriptions—only if one keeps in mind the total historical picture of the magical tradition in which Cagliostro was involved. Cagliostro never pretended that he was initiating an original work, and his declarations that he mostly "copied" ancient manuscripts are true—even if not in a literal sense—inasmuch as they indicate a conscious connection with a magical tradition which the Gran Cofto certainly did not invent.

The First Forty Days: From the Didactic Ritual to Theurgy

Among the instruments of magic, the sword, as Cagliostro knew, is not only the symbol of strong will which pulls power from the Gods, but also of the capacity to distinguish and to discriminate, which is believed to be crucial for the success of most magical operations. This was the principal meaning of the sword in, for example, the

magical system of the Golden Dawn.¹¹ The languages, the codes and the system of symbols in contemporary magical movements come from the most diverse sources: from Greece and China, from Pythagoras and the Druids, and sometimes even from Christianity and modern science (which has not lacked the capacity to furnish myths for the introduction of new rites). Despite this great variety there are certain significant common elements. There is, for example, a vision of the world shared by most of the new magical movements, which posits that there has been a fall from the original perfect condition into the limited world of matter and death, and that human beings may be reintegrated with their primitive state through techniques known by initiates. This scheme is found in Cagliostro: his most immediate antecedent was Jacques Martinez de Pasqually (1727-1774), the famed author of *A Treatise on Reintegration*, who however had less faith in magical techniques. These techniques, which at first blush appear in a variety of ways in the many new magical movements, can be reduced to common models and categories. It is in this area that Cagliostro is particularly important as a codifier, rather than for his work on the ideology of reintegration, where he did not create anything new.

From the point of view of ritual, the two quarantines had the most important impact on successive magical movements. The sword of Cagliostro separated theurgical from alchemical rituals, codifying a distinction that remains substantially unaltered in contemporary movements. Cagliostro, as many have written, has transmitted to his posterity the *Arcana Arcanorum*. This expression, which refers to the secret rituals revealed at the end and summit of the initiatory itinerary of a number of esoteric groups, is in reality ambiguous. The expression *Arcana Arcanorum* corresponds, in fact, to a number of different rituals. From this point of view the sword of Cagliostro has divided—in the sense of codifying—magical material that Cagliostro certainly did not invent, but which he collected during his various wanderings throughout the occult communities in Europe during his life. Much of the material collected by Cagliostro was derived from the German Order of the Golden Rosy Cross and probably from its schism (or, according to others, its inner circle) called the Order of the Initiated Brethren of Asia (or the Order of the Asiatic Brethren). The latter was founded by the Baron Hans Heinrich von Ecker-und-Eckhoffen (1750-1790) among a Jewish community which was characterized by the presence of the most cabalistic wings of the Messianic movements founded by Sabbatai Zevi and Jacob Frank.¹² It has been denied, in recent studies, that the milieu of Naples, where Cagliostro spent some years, in particular the circle of Prince Raimondo di Sangro di San Severo (1710-1771), was effectively involved—as was assumed by previous scholars—in the rituals of "spiritual alchemy" of the Order of the Golden Rosy Cross.¹³ Without entering into this debate, it is interesting to note that Raimondo di Sangro in a letter to the Baron Henri-Théodore Tschoudi (1724-1769), who was the creator in Naples of the masonic system known as the Blazing Star, claimed to know how to utilize a secret code that was used in the German Golden Rosy Cross.¹⁴

The first of the two quarantines of Cagliostro is a magical retreat of forty days consisting of rituals and prayers. After thirty-three days one commences to "enjoy the

favors of visible communications with the seven primeval angels and to know the seals and the numbers of these immortal Entities." After the fortieth day one receives the first "Pentagon, that is the virgin paper, on which the primeval angels have placed their numbers and seals," together with other seven "secondary Pentagons" on which "only one of the seven angels has placed its seal." Through the Pentagons one "commands the immortals in the name of God" with the "effect to bind or to command the aerial spirits, and to effectuate many wonders and miracles."¹⁵ This constitutes the theurgical ritual; his aim according to Cagliostro is to "obtain the Pentagon and become morally perfect." The immediate antecedents of this ritual are found in the masonic system utilized by the Blazing Star of Tschoudi, and in the rituals of the Golden Rosy Cross; the latter were republished by the learned mason Bernhard Beyer in the 1920's.¹⁶

Cagliostro's references to angels of various grades are found in some of the most important modern Anglo-Saxon magical movements. The Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn, founded in 1888—among the important figures in the literary world who were members were William Butler Yeats (who was also among its principal leaders), Arthur Machen and Algernon Blackwood, not to mention the wife of Oscar Wilde, Constance Mary—served as a breeding place for many founders of successive magical movements, from Aleister Crowley to Dion Fortune. Historians have concluded, with persuasive arguments, that the "Cipher Manuscript" which allegedly provided the "ancient" basis for the Golden Dawn mostly originated from the fantasy of its founders.¹⁷ It is, however, undeniable that there are analogies between the "Cipher Manuscript" and the first quarantine of Cagliostro, and this has caused the hypothesis to reemerge that there could be a common derivation for both the Golden Dawn and Cagliostro from the German Golden Rosy Cross, with which the analogies are many and lead one to exclude the possibility that it is simply coincidence.¹⁸ Naturally, if Cagliostro did not invent the evocation of the "Seven Primeval Angels" or of the "Holy Guardian Angel" it does not follow that they were absolutely new ideas of the Golden Rosy Cross which, for its part, also used more ancient rituals. For the evocation of the "Holy Guardian Angel" an important antecedent is certainly the *Book of Abra-Melin*, which is conserved in the Library of the Arsenal in Paris, and was republished in 1898 by the same S.L. MacGregor Mathers (1854-1918) who was one of the founders of the Golden Dawn. The book was attributed to "Abraham the Jew" who is asserted to have been born in 1362.¹⁹ The text, that an expert such as Aleister Crowley considered essential for all esoteric ritual, has been transcribed in the present form in the eighteenth century, but was probably written in the fifteenth century. The books making up the "forbidden work of Cornelius Agrippa"—quoted explicitly by Cagliostro in the first quarantine—are also from the fifteenth century, but the origins of theurgy and the evocation of angels are, of course, much more ancient. They date back to the fifteenth century, with the works of Pelagius, the hermit from Majorca whose *Anacrisis* has been recently republished by Robert Amadou²⁰; to the fourteenth century with Peter of Abano; to the first Christian centuries, with the *Oracles of the Chaldaeans*, which were apparently written by one Julianus called the Chaldaeus and by his son who was also called Julianus and significantly nicknamed the Theurgist. A text such as Pelagius'

Anacrisis contains many theurgical rituals similar to those of Cagliostro, and this is also true for a number of Renaissance rituals, where it is not always easy to distinguish, as Walker has proposed, between the theurgical rituals that are "spiritual" and "demonic" in nature.²¹ If a distinction is possible between different theurgic rituals, it should be connected to the number of angels that one is supposed to summon: one only (the Holy Guardian Angel), seven (the number preferred by Cagliostro) or the seventy-two which are summoned through the seven talismans called "olympians" in the "sacred Kabbalah," also called "angelic philosophy," which was codified in Lyon in the seventeenth century by the hermetic doctor Lazare Meysonier²² and utilized in the Order of the Elus Cohens of Martinez de Pasqually.

Apart from the cabalistic numerology of the angels, it is important to keep in mind—in order not to be confused by the stated goal of "effectuating many wonders and miracles" which can appear to be utilitarian only—that theurgy (as the title itself of the first quarantine of Cagliostro mentions) serves above all to "become morally perfect." The archetype of this process is the classic model of birth and death. It involves, in this case, a process by which one dies among the darkness in which he is immersed with the majority of humanity, and is reborn into a superior life. This "perfection" can be accomplished first of all as a result of a ritual, where the symbolism is present from the beginning but is explained and illustrated in detail only as the ritual progresses. This is the model of the ceremonies of Cagliostro's "Egyptian masonry" which has given rise to a great variety of "Egyptian" masonic rites. In fact, today there exist at least ten rival masonic rites, either "regular" or irregular, for males only, feminine or mixed, that are denominated "Egyptian," or of Memphis, or Misraïm (or Memphis/Misraïm), with a particularly intricate development in Italy, in France, in Belgium and in Latin America. All owe something to Cagliostro, whose rituals have today a posterity of some thousands persons. The "Egyptian" rites, whose complex history cannot be recounted here,²³ have been proposed in combination with various other esoteric currents, ranging from the Anthroposophy of Rudolf Steiner (in a combination which is today present above all in the German "Egyptian" lodge Zu den drein Rosen an der Elbe of Hamburg) to the theosophical system of Helena Blavatsky. Charles Webster Leadbeater (1874-1934) inserted in the very heart of the Theosophical Society a "Egyptian" masonic rite involving the maximum amount of discretion. All of these rites owe to Cagliostro most if not all of their rituals and doctrines. The *Arcana*, however, have disappeared from many contemporary branches of the Memphis-Misraïm, substituted by a purely didactic ritual. In reality, the rite of Misraïm—from which the rite of Memphis was basically a schism, partially absorbed when the Italian General Giuseppe Garibaldi assumed the role of International Grand Hierophant of both groups—was born in France through the work of the brothers Bédarride, at the time of the Congress of Vienna, as a purely cabalistic system, without the *Arcana* of Cagliostro (which arrived from Italy only some years later).²⁴

They were, at any rate, the *Arcana Arcanorum*, in a *first* meaning of the term, indicating the theurgical evocation of one or more angels through talismans, seals, pentagons, or other techniques. It would appear that the *Arcana Arcanorum* revealed

to the highest degrees of the various orders (Martinist, Neo-templars, and the "Egyptian" masonic rites of Misraïm and Memphis) presided over (all at the same time) by Gastone Ventura (1906-1981) one of the leading figures in recent Italian esoterism, (transcribed in the code which was used in the past by the Italian Navy), were precisely of this theurgical type, even if one cannot also exclude the presence of different *Arcana* connected to the second quarantine of Cagliostro rather than to the first. In the case of Ventura, it appears that the expression *Arcana* also indicated the ritual use of the bones of one's own ancestors to "recall them to life" and to be magically connected to their lineage (in particular, to call forth the ancestors' from the ashes of their bones). This is perhaps a further meaning of the expression *Arcana Arcanorum*, still within the theurgical model taken from the first quarantine but with a special emphasis on the myth of palingenesis. The ritual use of the ancestor's bones is, on the other hand, not unknown in many shamanic traditions. For Cagliostro there exists a continuity between "Egyptian" masonry and theurgical rites, and the first—with all of its ceremonies and didactic rites—is nothing more than a preparation, when not a representation, of the second. The use of magical techniques—for example, the magic of mirrors or cups of water, in which a young girl called "dove," or a young boy, watches serving as a seer—does not represent, from the eyes of Cagliostro, a central discontinuity in his system. The initiate of the "Egyptian" rite, prepared by the rituals, should be able to pass to the magical techniques without feeling any change in the substance of his or her experience.

The magic of mirrors—in a form similar to that of Cagliostro—was further cultivated, particularly in the Anglo-Saxon context. One finds such a system in Frederick Hockley (1808-1885), a key figure together with his friend Captain Francis George Irwin (1828-1893) for the diffusion of the influence of Cagliostro in the English-speaking world. Irwin, an important figure in the underworld of "fringe" masonry and occultism, was a member of the Sociefas Rosicruciana in Anglia (forerunner of the Golden Dawn) and was in such close relations with the ghost of Cagliostro that Kenneth Mackenzie (1833-1886) asked him to have the Count's spirit check the entry *Cagliostro* in his noted masonic encyclopedia. Hockley and Irwin collaborated, in addition to various occult ventures, in the foundation of a "Brotherhood of Light" that is—to some extent—at the origin of a more famous occult society, the Hermetic Brotherhood of Luxor, which, imported into France, would influence a series of famous esoteric masters, including René Guénon. In the materials of the Hermetic Brotherhood of Luxor (which has its own complex story) there are, together with other elements, notions of magic involving the mirrors where the influence of Cagliostro is very visible. Hockley himself used mirrors to put himself in contact, through a seer, Emma Louise Leigh, with an entity that he called the "Crowned Angel." When Leigh died in 1858, Hockley began searching for a substitute, and initiated into his magical system of mirrors a famous medium, Emma Hardinge Britten (1823-1899), a good friend of Madame Blavatsky. Britten will, in fact, in 1875, be among the founders of the Theosophical Society.²⁵ Years later, through channels which are not clear, the same magic of mirrors appeared again in the writings of Pascal Beverly Randolph (1825-

1875), an American mulatto who claimed to be a descendant from the royal family of Madagascar, and who is more noted for his interest in sex magic. Put under trial, he was recognized by the prosecutor himself to enjoy "a popularity as a writer of love, never before accorded to any man living or dead!—Ovidius, Michelet and Aristotle *not* excepted."²⁶

Problems have arisen when the mirrors and theurgy have been abandoned in order to borrow from Cagliostro only the teaching and didactic aspects of the Egyptian ritual. This is the reason for the lack of success and for the ultimate demise of various branches of the Memphis and Misraim rites and of other alternative Egyptian rites, which were found to be too long and repetitive. The admiration for Cagliostro—and, as we have seen, the use of common sources—is found, however, in the Golden Dawn, whose rituals were on the contrary very bright. But, on the other hand, the history of this order shows the conflict between those who were happy to participate in a primarily didactic ritual (even if it was so complex as to require intense study of a number of hermetic and cabalistic writings) and those who, on the other hand, wanted to "see something" in a theurgical rite. This is the main reason for the divisions and the schisms within the Golden Dawn itself, which were originally caused—above and beyond the problems of leadership and the further problems associated with Aleister Crowley (1875-1947)—by the formation of "groups" which attempted, outside the regular meetings of the order, to perform theurgical evocations which would have been impossible in less discreet meetings. The more conservative faction of the Golden Dawn—which was guided by the poet Yeats—was absolutely opposed to these "groups."²⁷ But the "groups"—with their theurgical rituals—continued, with varying success. From the magical movements that take their origin from the Golden Dawn, the Society of Inner Light of Dion Fortune (pseudonym for Violet Firth, 1890-1946) offers us another example of the contrast within the same magical order between mere didactic rituals and stronger theurgical rituals. When Dion Fortune was accused of reducing the movement's activities to the didactic rituals only—far removed from the original successes of the theurgical evocations—a group of followers, led by Christine Hartley (1897-1985) and Charles Richard Foster Seymour (1880-1943), abandoned her to establish an independent movement. The journals of the theurgical evocations made by Hartley and Seymour—in which gods, ancient heroes and angels present themselves in bright and impressive scenes—constitute one of the most notable testimonies of theurgical activities in our century.²⁸

With Dion Fortune—who had been a pupil of Freud and was already among one of the highest paid analysts in London when she was little more than twenty years old—we have one of the first examples of the encounter between psychoanalysis and theurgical teachings. Today many exponents of the magical movements—who are more or less influenced by Jung—do not have any difficulty admitting that their evocations of gods and angels bring about, in reality, the "inner self," or, perhaps, the "collective unconscious" of the group. In most modern forms of spiritualism, particularly in the Californian channeling popularized by Shirley McLaine, the sources of the "channeled" message are often related to concepts of contemporary psychology.²⁹ The most

extreme case—but at the same time one of the most interesting—was set forth in the 1976 volume *Conjuring Up Philip* in which eight persons of the Toronto area decided to create a fictitious character, "Philip," and to attempt to channel him, which they were successful in doing after some period of time. It is important to note that this experiment was not done with the intention of exposing channeling as a fraud or an illusion but, on the contrary, to present it as a perfectly legitimate—and therapeutically useful—method to enter into contact, through a determined ritual, with the collective unconscious.

This way of acting is more common than one might anticipate, even in the complex and varied phenomenon of the flying saucer cults. It has been observed that the extraterrestrials with whom the observers have entered into contact (in general through mediums, even if at the beginning of many groups there is a belief that the head of the group has been physically contacted by the "space brothers") have the role—which is not too difficult to guess—of secularized angels.³⁰ After all, even the extraterrestrials come, literally, from the sky.

In these developments, has Cagliostro been abandoned? One should not be too sure that the interpretations of the channeled or conjured entities as manifestations of an inner self are of recent origin, and only derive from the encounter between magic and psychoanalysis. One of the great ancestors of contemporary occultism, who in the history of the occult sciences would take a position second only to Cagliostro, and who was also in contact with the Neapolitan occult milieu, was Eliphas Lévi (pseudonym for Alphonse-Louis Constant, 1810-1875). Concerning his famous evocation of Apollonius of Tiana in 1854 in London, Lévi wrote: "Must I conclude from all of this that I have really called, seen and touched the great Apollo of Tiana? I am not such a dreamer or a simple mind to believe it." He concluded that "the real efficacy of the magical ceremonies" consists above all in the possibility to enter in contact with secret and hidden dimensions of human nature.³¹

Cagliostro's presence can also be found in the world of flying saucers. One recognizes easily that this world had a significant antecedent in a volume published in 1900, *From India to the Planet Mars. A Study in a Case of Somnambulism with Glossolalia* by Théodore Flournoy, a professor of psychology at the University of Geneva.³² The book is a story of a psychic trip into space by a medium using the pseudonym of "Hélène Smith," whose real name was Catherine Elise Mueller. This volume, which captured the attention of the famous language theory scholar Ferdinand de Saussure because of the characteristics of the "Martian" language of the medium, includes a Virgil-like character who guides "Hélène" through her paradise and her hell. This is the spirit guide "Léopold"; and one soon discovers that "Léopold" is none other than Cagliostro. In addition, Eugenio Siragusa (born 1919), one of the most famous European flying saucer contactees who is at the beginning of a number of UFO cults, often mentions Cagliostro and claims to be his reincarnation (both, after all, are Sicilian).³³ One may think that this is simply an abuse of the name of Cagliostro, and in one respect it certainly is. But for Cagliostro theurgy was a method "to become morally perfect and to achieve the reintegration." With this in mind, his system of ideas

is not too far from the concept (even if today it is expressed in different words) that the "Holy Guardian Angel" or the "Seven Angels" really represent a particular and superior state of the human nature.

The Second Quarantine: The Conquest of Immortality.

In the world of the modern Italian magical movements which more directly claim a relation to Cagliostro, the medical doctor from Perugia, Francesco Brunelli, whom we already mentioned, has represented for many years an alternative in leadership to Gastone Ventura. Trying to simplify his viewpoint, which is certainly much more complicated, one may say that the "Egyptian" masonic rite over which Brunelli presided gives more importance to the second quarantine than to the first quarantine, even if both esoteric Italian masters, Brunelli and Ventura, occupied themselves with the whole of Cagliostro's system. For Brunelli, the rite of Misraïm derives from Cagliostro, and the last degree of the rite is the eighty-ninth (the ninetieth is purely an honorary and an administrative degree) in which "one receives an explanation of the techniques by which man is unified with divinity through the ministry of the celestial spirits." Here one should find the *Arcana Arcanorum* in the "Egyptian" rite, with the consequence, according to Brunelli, that

the *Arcana Arcanorum*, which also includes esoteric teachings on Genesis and on reintegration, limit themselves to the Æonic magic (see the eighty-ninth degree), but do not have anything to do with transmutative magic. They conduct up to transmutation, and here they stop.... The *Arcana Arcanorum* and Cagliostro contemporaneously make reference to this part of magic and in particular to the contacts with the Aeons and the spirits which have superseded mortality, particularly with the seven planetary spirits...the magic transmutation does not belong to the *Arcana Arcanorum*, even if it is found in other parts of the Egyptian rite of Cagliostro.³⁴

Notice how the question of the *Arcana Arcanorum* appears to complicate itself once again. But it is not impossible to clarify it.

The sword of Cagliostro has separated with a clear cut the rituals of the first forty days from those of the second forty days: with the latter one attempts to "become physically [no longer morally] perfect." Although the text of Cagliostro's quarantines in Manuscript No. 245 of the Biblioteca Nazionale of Rome and the one conserved in the Bibliothèque du Musée Calvet of Avignon include some variants,³⁵ the second quarantine of Cagliostro in both versions requires that one retire to a place to "seriously fast." On the seventeenth day, one "gives a small emission of blood" and "begins to take certain white drops, that one cannot explain of what they are made," increasing the dose until on the thirty-second day, when, with "another small emission of blood," one "begins to take the first grain of *Materia Prima*." The next day "a second grain of *Materia Prima* will produce a strong fever of delirium and will cause one to lose his

skin, hair and teeth." After other rituals and practices, on the thirty-sixth day, the last grain of *Materia Prima* "will cause the hairs, teeth and skin to grow back" until the fortieth day when one "returns home rejuvenated and perfectly recreated."³⁶ All of this would probably seem, even to admirers of Cagliostro, an extremely bizarre practice destined above all to a sensation, an attitude that was certainly typical of the Italian magician. But in reality this is not the case. As we have already noted, Cagliostro is to be considered historically with reference to his immediate antecedents—the German Golden Rosy Cross—and all the rituals of this group in turn should be considered within the history of a long magical tradition. In the second quarantine, all is not entirely clear, perhaps in part because the same ritual can probably be interpreted at various levels of understanding. Cagliostro knew both forms of alchemy mentioned by the German Golden Rosy Cross, the "laboratory" alchemy and the "internal" or "spiritual" alchemy (where the "laboratory" is the body of the magician).

A significant antecedent of Cagliostro's method of "becoming young again" is contained in the *Thesaurus Thesaurorum*, a complex manual used by the Golden Rosy Cross, which is dated 1580, but which is certainly more recent. Under the title "How One Uses Magic to Change One's Nature and to Become Young Again" there are prescriptions very similar to those of Cagliostro, and at times almost identical.³⁷

Apart from some understandable dietetic variants—Cagliostro suggests breaking the fast with Italian biscuits where the Germans suggest beer—the two rituals both describe a magical retreat of forty days in very similar terms. The German text suggests taking what it calls the *Lapis Medicinalis Macrocosmi*, obtained through an elaborate "laboratory" alchemy that may use earth and dew drops, but suggests one use "more easily—rainwater."³⁸ At least at a primary level of understanding, the "white drops that one cannot explain of what they are made" mentioned by Cagliostro are the result of a similar distillation. According to the German *Thesaurus* it is necessary to add a "philosopher's stone" obtained from the alchemical distillation of one's own blood; we have found a similar reference to the blood in Cagliostro. Both Cagliostro and the *Thesaurus* also refer to "grains of *Materia Prima*." To determine what they consists of, the hypothesis, even among the specialists of Cagliostro, is not unanimous, but they refer to the distinctions (in the Golden Rosy Cross and in similar organizations in France and Germany) between a "dry way" and a "wet way." The dry way, which was certainly practiced in the Golden Rosy Cross—consisted of eating "grains" obtained from urine and gold. The wet way consisted, on the other hand, of eating, in diverse ways, the semen. It is certain that Cagliostro taught the dry way. It is at least probable that the wet way was also taught by him (and was included also in the teachings of Baron Tschoudy), so that the second quarantine can be read contemporaneously at two levels. One could call the first way of reading the second quarantine the "physical part" of the *Arcana Arcanorum*, and the second way a "transmutation magic" superior to the *Arcana* (this is the terminology chosen by Brunelli). Or one could consider the transmutation practice of the internal alchemy a part, and even the highest part of the *Arcana Arcanorum* (this is the terminology used in various occult orders in France and in Belgium). The terminology can become equivocal but the substance does not change.

Many have interpreted the "physical regeneration" as purely allegorical and symbolic. But this effectively means taking it out of its appropriate place in Cagliostro's system and, even, reading Cagliostro by completely leaving out his antecedents. Brunelli seems to have had good reason when, in one of his works against the "allegorical" interpretation, he wrote that

The doctrine of physical reintegration corresponds really to the transmutation practice . . . that was practiced, in both the West and the East, by numerous initiates. Only those who have the key of arcane understanding are permitted to comprehend how and what are intended the famous forty days. But for the understanding to occur it is necessary to have the keys both of the lesser arcane (which explains the work) and of the higher arcane (which explains the forty days). But, in order to understand the Arcanes one should previously have practiced Æonic magic [i.e. in Brunelli's language, theurgy], and in order to *practice* magic it is not enough to write historical books.

"Ultimately, as one sees," concludes Brunelli (though here it is more difficult to agree with him), "things are more simple than one would believe."³⁹ It helps to understand that for Brunelli the "lesser Arcane" is a succession of operations of sexual magic intended to obtain the semen to be used for the "transmutation magic" separated from each other by lunar times, while in the "higher Arcane" periodic sex magic operations are separated by times which are astrologically both solar and lunar. These techniques were transmitted to Brunelli by Luigi Petriccione, the "Imperator" of an organization called "Rosa+Croce Italica" (Italian Rosy+Cross) that derived from the Neapolitan tradition. Brunelli also received various documents concerning the "Egyptian" tradition from France and Belgium through an important leader of the Memphis-Misraïm, Ambrogio Gerosa,⁴⁰ which the latter obtained from various occult branches whose sources can ultimately be traced back to Cagliostro.

The "wet" way and the Arcana of sexual magic can appear particularly strange. However, Brunelli was not incorrect when he argued that "numerous initiates still practice them even in our day." Even for this technique it may be useful to include a brief excursion on the long magical tradition which on this point preceded—and explains—Cagliostro and his methods.

The purpose of ritual magic is often an attempt to gain immortality, in this case through a "body of glory" obtained through a process of "separation" (which is the substance of the whole "inner alchemy") of the spiritual from the material elements of man. It is important to note that "material" or "matter" and the "body" are not equivalent terms in the esoteric tradition. Matter is a philosophical category that, from the point of view of epistemology, is defined in opposition to the spirit. From this perspective a large portion of esoteric thought can be considered the exact overturning of materialism described by Lenin in *Materialism and Empiriocriticism*, where matter is also a philosophical category. For Lenin matter was a positive category: extreme Marxist materialists, such as Bazarov, spoke of "Holy Matter" inducing Lenin to take

more caution in the 1920 edition of his book with respect to the first publication of the work in 1908.⁴¹ For the esoteric tradition matter is a negative category, but it remains nevertheless a philosophical category rather than an empirical one. The body, on the other hand, is in the esoteric tradition a very complex reality including both a "part of light" and a material part; the two must be separated and the "part of light" must be liberated through various techniques. For most esoteric traditions not all men are immortal. Only those who are successful in separating the "part of light" from the wicked mixture in which it is combined with the material part are able to create a "body of glory" which will assure them immortality. In a series of comparative surveys, Mircea Eliade has underlined the presence in many cultures of an identification, or at least "consubstantiality," between spirit, the "part of light" in man, and the semen. Hence a whole series of techniques are utilized for the "separation" which concentrate on the semen. During sexual relations the semen is retained through the technique of coitus reservatus (sometimes called "karezza" in Anglo-Saxon versions), or, alternately, if already expended it is "reinserted" into the body, either diluted into a drink or elixir, sometimes together with feminine secretions, and drank, or aspirated from the nose (snorted like cocaine: a technique which is, however, considered dangerous by many). In other versions studied by Eliade, the technique consists of meditating—for example experimenting with different colors of light—during sexual intercourse.

The origin of these techniques is uncertain. They were clearly part of a secret Indo-Tibetan tantric ritual, attested by ritual artifacts and texts such as Abhinavagupta's *Trident of Wisdom*. At the same time, one finds parallel rituals in certain gnostic ceremonies, such as those of the Fibionites. Whether the ultimate origin was Iranian, Indian, or Gnostic (entering Tantrism only lately) was a matter of controversy between Eliade and the noted Italian indologist Giuseppe Tucci, and is not, ultimately, part of our theme.⁴² Similar techniques, particularly for the retention of the semen, have also been found in China (where they are still practiced in Taoist monasteries, despite political conditions) and may be even more ancient.⁴³ It is in any case certain that we are speaking of very ancient rituals that, in Europe, pass from some gnostic schools through the alchemic and cabalistic currents of the Middle Ages and the Renaissance (where many alchemic texts can be read at two levels), until one finds them again in occult organizations formed and organized—above all in Germany—in the seventeenth century. And this takes us back to Cagliostro.

After Cagliostro, even if we do not lack for followers of the "dry" way, it is above all the "wet" way, centered around the sexual ritual, which spreads throughout the occult underworld, along three diverse lines: a French language line (associated with the highest *Arcana* of some of the many branches of the "Egyptian" rite of Memphis and Misraïm); an English language line with Hargrave Jennings (1817-1890) in England and Pascal Beverly Randolph in the United States; and an Italian language line following the succession of various esoteric circles, particularly in Naples. In this latter line a previously secret "Egyptian Order" manifests itself externally in the first decades of our century with the Brotherhood of Miriam (or "Myriam") of Giuliano Kremmerz (pseudonym for Ciro Formisano, 1861-1930), who left one of the most complete

modern systems of sex magic. Both the French and English language schools, through a series of passages, also influenced German groups such as the circles of Theodor Reuss (1855-1923), another key figure in modern sex magic, who initiated both Aleister Crowley and Arnoldo Krumm-Heller (1876-1949) into the Ordo Templi Orientis (O.T.O.), which had been founded by the Austrian industrialist Carl Kellner (1850-1905). The latter, through its Fraternitas Rosicruciana Antiqua (F.R.A.), brought this German line to Latin America, the only continent where it has a mass following in a simplified form originating from the Gnostic Movement founded by an independent student of Krumm-Heller, the Colombian Samaël Aun Weor (1911-1978). The Gnostic Movement founded by Weor, which emphasizes a tantric technique based on coitus reservatus, counts among its followers (divided in three main branches by subsequent schisms) some tens of thousands (and which today has a good following in Europe). In the writings of Samaël Aun Weor one finds, among other things, references to Cagliostro.⁴⁴

While one can say that at the center of the esoteric orders founded by the above personages the ritual practiced is connected with sex magic, one must be careful to realize that all of these modern esoteric groups have a large number of schisms, and that organizations with similar names may be following rituals which are very different. For example, among the groups which reflect the teachings of Giuliano Kremmerz (and of which there exist at least nine principal branches in conflict with one another),⁴⁵ some of the branches express a particular interest in the sexual-magic *Arcana* whereas others reject it altogether (confining themselves to the magical therapeutic "rituals of Isis" of the Brotherhood of Miriam without following the "rituals of Osiris" in which the sexual magic is found).⁴⁶ The same is true for many groups of the Masonic rites of Memphis and Misraïm, which stay totally away from the *Arcana* of the internal alchemy.

On the other hand, as one begins to understand the different *Arcana* and their impact on contemporary esoteric movements, one is struck by how widespread are the references to the second quarantine of Cagliostro, which is interpreted precisely in terms of internal alchemy. The goal is always the separation in the human body of the small divine spark (*pneuma*, which according to this logic is the equivalent of the semen) from the matter in which it has fallen. This separation permits the (re)construction of the "body of glory." According to Eliade: "redemption signifies essentially the liberation of this divine 'interior man' and his return to his native kingdom of light."⁴⁷ Brunelli explains in a text which is reserved for those who arrive at the pinnacle of his ordinances, the *Liber T. Uno*, that "while the [Roman Catholic] Eucharist speaks of the body and the blood of Christ, the solar rite consists of the body and the blood of the God in us." Here, if the rite is efficacious, "if we reach the light of the sun then we will eat the sun." "You copulate with yourself, therefore in you will be born the baby that will become an adult and will become the new you—the new man with the body of glory." The initiate will obtain the result of "recuperating his original condition (human or superhuman or divine)," not because of external help, but "thanks to himself, to the divinity in himself that must come forth, thanks to the gold which is in himself."⁴⁸

We are now able, after passing through the texts of Francesco Brunelli, who is a key figure in our history, to determine the precise legacy of the *Arcana Arcanorum* (containing rites that were codified—not invented—by Cagliostro) for the various contemporary magical movements. It consists of the following, realizing that there are various meanings of the same terms, and that these different meanings already existed in Cagliostro and in his circle: *Arcana Arcanorum* means,

- (a) first of all, a theurgical system of evocation, utilizing various techniques, of the Holy Guardian Angels or of a plurality of angels (in one variation, the "Guardian Angel" evoked is the ancestor, the progenitor of one's lineage);
- (b) it also means a practice of laboratory alchemy, in which dew drops, blood, gold and urine are combined;
- (c) finally it means a practice of inner alchemy, i.e. of sex magic.

We have followed together the shadow of Cagliostro and have seen the influence, at times indirect but more often direct, which he has exercised on a large number of diverse movements. Even if the relevance of these movements is downplayed, they nevertheless have some thousands of followers. Those who, including the present author, observe these magical movements from the point of view of a Roman Catholic scholar, cannot avoid being critical of their world view and practices. However, it would be insufficient criticism if one concentrated only on the moral aspect. We are confronted with more than a form of libertinism and of practices contrary to any sexual morality. It is certain, and not only in authors such as Crowley, that this is one aspect of our subject matter. But the most important part of the rituals of the Cagliostro lineage is something else. It consists of a form of auto-redemption in which the magical will of a person captures his or her own immortality, obtains eternal life, and thus becomes sovereign and lord over life and over death, having the power of God with respect to the same. It is this pretense of "becoming like God," in a literal and not only a figurative sense, that seems to me to be the ultimate significance, and the principal challenge, of Cagliostro. In this sense, his legacy is still alive.

NOTES:

1. See Hans Nintzel, "Alchemy is Alive and Well," *Gnosis* 8 (Summer 1988), pp. 11-15. On Cagliostro in general the bibliography is immense. A good starting point is the catalogue of the 1989 exhibition *Le Comte de Cagliostro*, edited by Bruno Marty (Les-Baux-de-Provence: Les Amis du Prince Noir, 1989). The essential bibliography is quoted in the excellent entry *Cagliostro* by R.A. in Daniel Ligou (ed.), *Dictionnaire de la Franc-maçonnerie*, 2nd ed., (Paris: P.U.F. 1987), pp. 183 f.
2. See Massimo Introvigne, *Il cappello del mago. I nuovi movimenti magici dallo spiritismo al satanismo* (Milano: SugarCo, 1990).
3. Carlo Francovich, *Storia della Massoneria in Italia dalle origini alla Rivoluzione francese* (Firenze: La Nuova Italia, 1984) p. 29.
4. This is the thesis of Vincenzo Ferrone, *I profeti dell'Illuminismo. Le metamorfosi della ragione nel tardo Settecento italiano* (Roma-Bari: Laterza, 1989), pp. 249-250. This work's value is that it perfectly gathers the duplicity of Italian Enlightenment.
5. Mons. Giuseppe Casale, (Archbishop of Foggia-Bovino), "I cattolici e la sfida dei nuovi movimenti magici," *Cristianità*, XIX, 190, (February 1991), pp. 15-18.
6. Marc Haven, *Le Maître inconnu Cagliostro. Etude historique et critique sur la haute magie*, 2nd ed. enlarged, (Paris: Pythagore, 1932), p. 145.
7. See R.A., *Cagliostro*, p. 182.
8. Philippe Encausse, *Le Maître Philippe de Lyon. Thaumaturge et "Homme de Dieu"*, 10th ed. (Paris: Editions Traditionnelles, 1985). Philippe Encausse (who died in 1984) was the son of Gérard Encausse (1865-1916), *alias* Papus, who recognized in Philippe his "spiritual teacher."
9. Francovich, *Storia della Massoneria*, p. 65.
10. Francesco Brunelli, *I riti egizi della Massoneria. Delle storie e qualche commento, in Rituali dei gradi simbolici della Massoneria di Memphis e Misraim*, edited by Francesco Brunelli, (Foggia: Bastogi, 1981), pp. 26-27.
11. See Jean-Pascal Ruggiu, *Les rituels magiques de l'Ordre Hermétique de la Golden Dawn*, (Paris: Télètes, 1990), p. 18.
12. See F.J. Molitor, *Histoire d L'Ordre des Frères de Saint Jean l'Evangeliste d'Asie et d'Europe*, in the appendix of Arthur Mandel, *Le Messie Militant ou la Fuite du Ghetto. Histoire de Jacob Frank et du mouvement frankiste* (Milano: Arché, 1989); Titus Maims,

"Carl Boehmann und der Untergang des Ordens der 'Asiatischen Bruder' in Pymont," *Quatuor Coronati Jarbuch 1987*, pp. 71-107.

13. See V. Ferrone, *I profeti dell'illuminismo*, pp. 216-237.
14. The letter dated November 14, 1753 is quoted in Clara Miccinelli, *E Dio creò l'uomo e la massoneria* (Genova: ECIG, 1985), pp. 38, 52. The alphabet corresponds to that reported and discussed by Bernh.(ard) Beyer, *Das Lehrsystem des Orden der Gold- und Rosenkreuzer*, (Leipzig: Pansophie-Verlag, 1925).
15. This is the text of Ms.245 in the Biblioteca Nazionale di Roma (there are some variations in the French texts).
16. See B. Beyer, *Das Lehrsystem*.
17. This is the thesis of Ellic Howe, *The Magicians of the Golden Dawn. A Documentary History of a Magical Order 1887-1923*, 2nd ed., Wellingborough (Northamptonshire): The Aquarian Press, 1985.
18. See J.-P. Ruggiu, *Les rituels magiques*, p. 4.
19. See S.(amuel) L.(iddell) MacGregor Mathers, *The Book of the Sacred Magic of Abra-Melin the Mage* (London: Watkins, 1898).
20. Pélagius, *L'Anacrise*, edited by Robert Amadou, (Paris: Cariscript, 1989).
21. See D.P. Walker, *Spiritual and Demonic Magic, from Ficino to Campanella*, (Notre Dame (Indiana): University of Notre Dame Press, 1975).
22. See René Le Forestier, *La Franc-Maçonnerie occultiste au XVIII^e siècle et l'Ordre des Elus Coëns* (Paris: Dorbon-Ainé, 1928), p. 232.
23. For a more detailed description see *Il cappello del mago*, pp. 164-173, wherein I have described the most significant details of various Egyptian rites which, because of space limitations, I have not been able to describe here.
24. See Michel Moncreau, *Les secrets hermétiques de la Franc-Maçonnerie et les rites de Misraïm et Memphis*, (Paris: Axis Mundi, 1989).
25. For details concerning the Hermetic Brotherhood of Luxor, see *Il cappello del mago*, pp. 200-204.
26. *The Rose Cross Order*, edited by R. Swinburne Clymer, (Allentown (Pennsylvania): Philosophical Publishing Co., 1916), p. 135.

27. See George Mills Haper, *Yeats's Golden Dawn. The Influence of the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn on the life and art of W.B. Yeats* (London: Macmillan, 1974).
28. See *Dancers to the Gods. The Magical Records of Charles Seymour and Christine Hartley 1937-1939*, edited by Alan Richardson, (Wellingborough: The Aquarian Press, 1985); and the first part (which contains the diary of Christine Hartley during the years 1940-1942) of Alan Richardson and Geoff Hughes, *Ancient Magicks for a New Age. Rituals from the Merlin Temple. The Magick of the Dragon King* (St. Paul: Llewellyn, 1989), pp. 35-94.
29. For a broader panorama see, Massimo Introvigne, "Il "channeling": uno spiritismo moderno?," in Massimo Introvigne (ed.) *Lo spiritismo*, (Leumann (Torino): Elle Di Ci, 1989).
30. See the pertinent observations of Jean-François Mayer, "Il messaggio religioso dei dischi volanti," in Massimo Introvigne, Jean François Mayer and Ernesto Zucchini, *I nuovi movimenti religiosi. Sette cristiane e nuovi culti* (Leumann (Torino): Elle Di Ci, 1990), pp. 306-312; and Ernst Benz, *Kosmische Bruderschaft. Die Pluralität der Welten. Zur Ideengeschichte des Ufo-Glaubens* (Freiburg i.B.: Aurum Verlag, 1978). Concerning "Philip" see Iris Owen and Margaret Sparrow, *Conjuring Up Philip*, (New York: Harper & Row, 1976).
31. See Christopher McIntosh, *Eliphas Lévi and the French Occult Revival*, (London: Rider and Co., 1972), p. 104.
32. See Théodore Flournoy, *Dalle Indie al pianeta Marte. Il caso Hélène Smith: dallo spiritismo alla nascita della psicoanalisi*, [Italian translation from original] (Milano: Feltrinelli, 1985).
33. See Filippo Bongiovanni and Giorgio Bongiovanni, *Eugenio Siragusa: il contattato*, (Palermo: Giannone, 1989).
34. F. Brunelli, *I riti egizi*, pp. 41-42.
35. In anticipation of the publication of these documents of Avignon by Robert Amadou I have been able to consult the feminine version in: *Statuts et Règlements de la Loge mère d'adoption de La haute-maçonnerie Égyptienne fondée par le Grand Cophite à l'O.: de Paris*, ms., Avignon, Bibliothèque du Musée Calvet.
36. This is again the Italian version of Ms. 245 in Rome.
37. *Thesaurus Thesaurorum a Fraternitate Rosae et Aureae Crucis Testamento Anno MDLXXX*, [Italian Translation], (Milano: Agape, 1989), pp. 123-124.
38. *Ibid.*, p. 47.
39. F. Brunelli, *I riti egizi*, p. 29.

40. Concerning these matters see, *Il cappello del mago*, pp. 231-233.
41. See, with the Introduction, Vladimir I. Lenin, *Materialismo ed Empiriocriticismo*, in *Opere scelte*, [Italian Translation] (Rome: Editori Riuniti and Moscow: Progress, n.d.), vol. III.
42. See M. Eliade, *Spirito, luce e seme*, in *Occultismo, stregoneria e mode culturali*, [Italian Translation] (Firenze: Sansoni, 1982), pp. 105-140 (with the references to the Tucci articles on the subject).
43. See Catherine Despeaux, *Immortelles de la Chine ancienne. Taoïsme et alchimie féminine* (Puisseaux: Pardés, 1990). In this paper I have made reference for the most part to male rituals. In ancient China there also existed a feminine ritual wherein the retention of semen was replaced by the "beheading of the red dragon," that is, a technique whereby menstruation is arrested. See *ibid.*
44. See, for example, Samaël Aun Weor, *Le Livre Jaune. Etats de jinas et voyage astral*, [French translation], (Montreal: Ganesha, 1984), p. 176.
45. I have attempted to reconstruct the schisms of the Brotherhood of Miriam and of the Egyptian Order (together with the related rituals) in *Il cappello del mago*, pp. 298-308.
46. See, *ibid.*, pp. 302-305.
47. M. Eliade, *Spirito, luce e seme*, p. 127.
48. [Francesco Brunelli], *Liber T. Uno. Sull'Operazione Solstiziale Trasmutatoria*, n.p. - n.d., n. 8 n. 10, n. 22, n. 3.